

Fulper's of Flemington

by Jack Sullivan

Left: The Fulper Pottery original factory, located at Mine Street in Flemington. This photo was taken in 1909, when in full production of fancy whiskey jugs. (Courtesy of the Hill-Fulper-Stangl Museum)



Almost a decade ago, writing in *Bottles and Extras*, I proposed that the Fulper Pottery Company of Flemington, N.J., was the source of a commonly seen style of fancy whiskey jug.

These are easily recognized because of their light tops, dark bottoms, gold lettering and ornamentation and, most particularly, hand-painted flowers on the sides. None has ever been found with a pottery mark. Nevertheless, most collections of whiskey ceramics include them.

My 1993 article made the connection because of a 1905 advertisement that the Fulper company ran in a national trade publication for liquor manufacturers and distributors.

As shown on the next page, the ad featured two jugs. The one on the left is shaped very close to the whiskey ceramics in question. Moreover, the ad described the Fulper jugs as "fancy," "handsomely made," and "fancifully marked."

From that slim evidence and with considerable trepidation my conclusion was that Fulper was the manufacturer.

For a long time I have sought further evidence for the identification -- either to refute or confirm it. Several knowledgeable collectors, notably Spec Spangler and Tim Kearns, agreed - but had little additional evidence.

Personal contact with several experts on American pottery yielded nothing. As the years passed, my frustration grew.

Recently, however, I became aware that a museum featuring Fulper pottery and its successor, Stangl, had been established in Flemington two years ago by pottery historian Rob Runge and his wife, Diana

Bullock-Runge.

Working from the museum website, www.stanglpottery.org, I obtained Rob Runge's email address and contacted him. He answered quickly, said it was quite possible that Fulper had been the potter, and asked me to send him some photos of the whiskey jugs, which I did. His response came quickly and had me whooping with glee: "Yes, they were indeed produced by Fulper Pottery." he wrote.

Rob explained that during the 1890s, Fulper's production was being switched from hand thrown saltglazed vessels to "jiggered" items employing an off-white Bristol glaze and dark Albany slip, a conversion that was completed by 1902.

The earlier kilns had burned wood but the new ones used soft coal. Both created temperatures of between 2200

and 2300 degrees, as required for stoneware. Sometime after, a small decorating kiln was added, capable of temperatures of only 1200-1300 degrees. This kiln was used for firing the gold lettering and detail as well as the painted flowers.

Because the Fulper ad is dated 1905, he believes that this decorating kiln was added before that date. Since none of the Fulper "fancies" were made after the on-set of Prohibition, that means all these jugs were manufactured between 1902 and 1920. Thus, many are approaching 100-years-old.

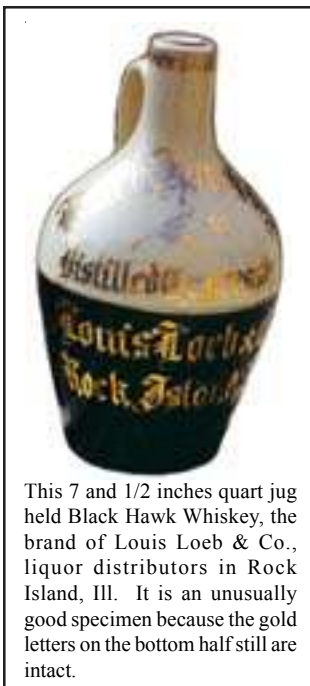
Rob notes that insurance maps of the time show the decorating kiln to have been very small so that its output also would have been limited. The lettering and the florals, he notes, look enough alike to have been applied by one or two people.

"One decorator would have been able to decorate enough jugs in one or two days to fill up the kiln and keep up with demand."

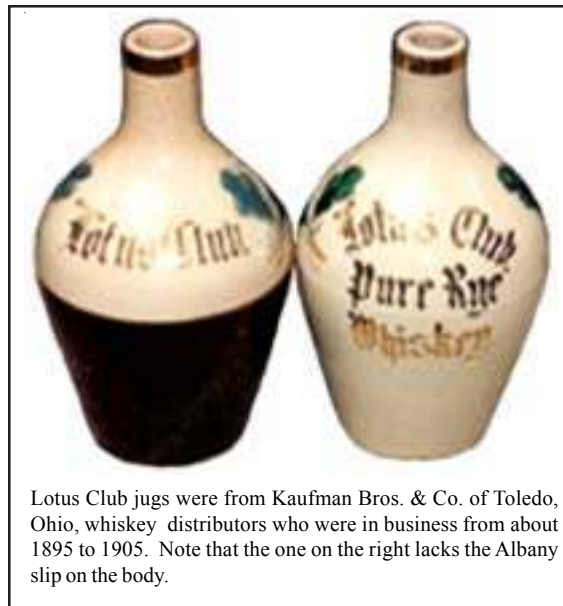
Because fancy jugs often were "giveaways" by whiskey distillers and distributors to saloon owners and bartenders, or passed on by them to their best customers, large quantities likely would not have been required.

Of these whiskey jugs, Rob says: "While technically not art ware they are typical of the type of ware Fulper was producing in the early years of the 20th Century, while developing the highly recognized Vasecraft art line introduced in 1909."

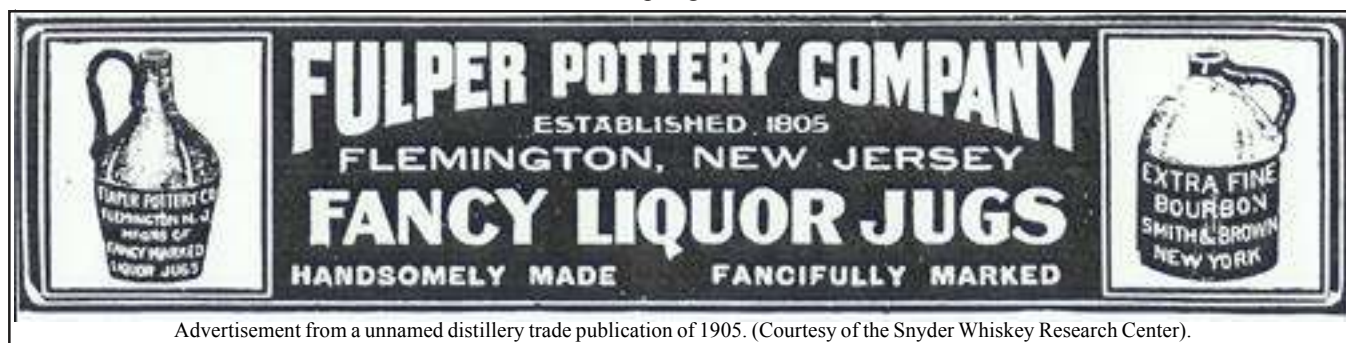
He noted that until he saw my photos of these jugs, he had wondered what items were being decorated in the low-fire kiln since none had ever come to his attention. He knows of no catalogs or other paper records for this line of ceramics, except



This 7 and 1/2 inches quart jug held Black Hawk Whiskey, the brand of Louis Loeb & Co., liquor distributors in Rock Island, Ill. It is an unusually good specimen because the gold letters on the bottom half still are intact.



Lotus Club jugs were from Kaufman Bros. & Co. of Toledo, Ohio, whiskey distributors who were in business from about 1895 to 1905. Note that the one on the right lacks the Albany slip on the body.



Advertisement from a unnamed distillery trade publication of 1905. (Courtesy of the Snyder Whiskey Research Center).

the advertisement shown in this article.

The pottery operated from Flemington, a town of just over 4,000 about 23 miles north of Trenton in western New Jersey.

Although the ad cites a founding date for the firm of 1805, that claim probably was a merchandising ploy. The actual founding occurred in 1814 by Samuel Hill, who had just finished his pottery apprenticeship and was drawn to Flemington because of its red clay soils.

Under Hill, the factory made redware items like drainage pipe and food storage crocks. One of his employees was Abraham Fulper who purchased the company from Hill's heirs in 1858. Subsequently the pottery took his name and began manufacturing stoneware as well as redware. These were utilitarian items, including canning jars, bottles and jugs.

Fulper married in 1839 and had five sons -- all of whom eventually worked in the pottery. After Abraham died in 1881, he was succeeded by his sons and the firm became known as Fulper Bros. The business prospered and by 1897 was producing 1,500 stoneware items daily. In 1899, it was incorporated as the Fulper Pottery Co., with George W. Fulper as

president.

During the early part of the 20th Century, the firm was experimenting with a variety of glazes and shapes in order to take advantage of the growing market in America for domestically-produced art pottery.

Under the leadership of Abraham's grandson and George's nephew, William Hill Fulper II., who became plant manager in 1902, the firm developed a group of glazes called "famille rose" that proved popular, selling for prices as high as \$150 for a single piece.

With technical supervision from ceramic engineer Johan Martin Stangl, hired in 1910, the firm continued to expand its glazes and range of art ware. The firm won "highest award" for pottery at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco and for a time Fulper enjoyed a reputation for producing "the finest art ware of its kind in the world," according to expert David Rago.

The company maintained a sales office and showroom on posh Fifth Avenue in Manhattan and boasted offices in London, Paris, Milan and Buenos Aires.

The firm's guiding force, William Fulper, died in 1928. In 1929, a fire

destroyed the original factory but production continued from a second facility in Flemington, and one established in Trenton in 1926.

Prohibition killed the market for whiskey containers and the Great Depression drastically cut the demand for art ware. Stangl, who had been made company president in 1926, became majority stockholder and eventually bought out the other owners.

He closed the Flemington works in 1935 but continued production in Trenton of dinnerware and gift items. The name was changed to Stangl Pottery in 1955, and the company survived until 1980, when it succumbed to competition from cheaper foreign imports.

Gone but not forgotten, this American pottery heritage has been given new life through the establishment of the Fulper-Stangl Museum. It is located in the old kiln building of the second Fulper plant in Flemington that now is part of a Pfaltzgraff Pottery factory outlet store.

The museum is open seven days a week from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and on Saturday until 7 p.m.

Today the Fulper mark on a piece of pottery makes the item highly desirable to collectors. Unfortunately, the company chose not to put its name on its production of whiskey containers. Rob Runge believes this is because they were special orders for jobbers who requested that items not bear a pottery mark.

While not artware, the jugs undeniably are "fancy," as the 1905 advertisement proclaims. The gothic gold lettering, gold embellishments, and hand-painted flowers set them apart from the usual.

Moreover, while many stoneware whiskeys feature a dark Albany slip on top and an off-white Bristol glaze on the bottom, on these jugs the reverse is true.

Thereby lies a problem, however, since the gold lettering did not adhere well to the smooth dark body surface, and on many examples, the decoration is badly



Left: A Ritter & Co. of Detroit was the distributor of the Mellow Monogram Whiskey in this Fulper jug. This company first appears in Detroit business directories in 1892 and ceased business 24 years later with the advent of Prohibition. **Middle:** Filenfeld's Washington Club appears to be a Fulper product but is an unusual bulbous shaped and features a "kick-up" base. **Right:** Anderson Club was registered in 1906 as a brand from Charles Shaffner & Co. of Chicago.



First: Keystone Rye was a brand of Klein Bros. & Hyman for the decade of their Cincinnati partnership, 1887-1897, and then again for Klein Bros. alone, 1898-1918. **Second:** The idea that these ceramics frequently were used for presentation to favored clients or customers is emphasized by this jug, "Compliments of H.R. Schlouch." **Third:** This whiskey jug features a fancy gold wreath on the body for Imperial Club Pure Rye, the brand of Wm. S. Page & Co. of New York City. The firm was in business at 1451 First Avenue, Manhattan, from at least 1902 to Prohibition. This one lacks the flowers on the sides. **Fourth and Fifth:** Two varieties of china painted florals were featured on the Fulper jugs, possibly reflecting the personality of the artist.

faded or missing. Despite this problem, the whiskey jugs were very popular and Fulper sold a considerable number to distillers and distributors east of the Rockies.

Even after the contents were consumed, recipients were reluctant to throw the containers away, often keeping them around the house as decorative items.

Fulper whiskeys have surfaced as far away as Australia and South Africa.

They can be purchased at bottle shows and on eBay, where they are relatively common, usually for under \$50, although a jug with all its original gold lettering and trim intact could be worth significantly more.

When compared to the attention paid to Red Wing whiskeys, these jugs have attracted little heed or respect from dealers and collectors. Perhaps this will change when Rob Runge's forthcoming book on Fulper Pottery is published with photos of the jugs, thus definitively establishing their provenance.

Following is a compiled list of 58 different Fulper jugs. It is far from exhaustive. Because none of these items is marked, it is possible that another firm or firms were "copy cats," making the same style containers. But the general uniformity of the gilding and china-painted florals leads me to believe that all, or virtually all, are from Fulper of Flemington. Where the city of origin appears on the ceramic, it is included after the name of the whiskey on the list. When the city is in parentheses, that indicates that the location was not part of the label, but was added by using other sources.

THE LIST OF FULPER POTTERY "FANCY" WHISKEY JUGS

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| A.A.A.A., Baker Rye, Loeb Bros., & Co. | Keystone Rye, Klein Bros. & Hyman, Cincinnati |
| A.T. Kerr, Buffalo, N.Y. | Landman & Co., Old Crow (Toledo, Ohio) |
| Anderson Club Pure Bourbon, 1880 (Chas. Shaffner & Co., Chicago) | Log Cabin Rye (Uniontown, Ky.) |
| Artel, Nelson Cty, Ky. | Lotus Club, Sour Mash (Toledo) |
| Best's Favorite Pure Rye (Harmonsville, Ky.) | Louis Loeb & Co., Rock Island Ill. |
| Black Hawk Rye, Louis Loeb, Rock Island, Ill | M. Reilly's Best |
| Bouquet Whiskey, Humphrey & Martin (Philadelphia) | M. Reilly's Sunny Side, XXX, 1880 |
| C. Krnus, Wheeling W. Virginia, Freeport | McKenna's Best (Nelson Country, Ky.) |
| C. Markel, Indianapolis, Registered | Meadville Rye, F.H. Cronin, Troy N.Y. |
| Chas. Ray's, — Bayline or Bayonne (?) | Mellow Monogram Whiskey, C.F. Ritter & Co. (Detroit) |
| H.R. Schlouch, Compliments of | O.F.A. Taylor (rest is rubbed off) |
| D.R. Collins & Co., Golden Leaf Rye | Old Pennsylvania Rye |
| Davy Crockett (Union Distilling, Cincinnati) | Olympia Club (Trenton, N.J.) |
| Edgewood Whiskey, from Dist. No. 76, Lincoln Cty. Ky. | P. Kelly Co., Monhrello (?) Whiskey |
| Elias Hyman & Son, Keystone Rye (Cincinnati) | P. Welty, Dougherty Rye, 1881 (Wheeling, W.Va.) |
| Elvin Bros., Cincinnati | P. Welty, Dougherty Whiskey (Wheeling) |
| Filenfeld's Washington Club | P. Welty, Monticello Rye (Wheeling) |
| Filstone's Club, 1880, Ky. Sour Mash | P. Welty, O.F.C. Taylor (Wheeling) |
| Frank Collman, from J.A. Nichols, Bristol, Tenn. | P. Welty, Old Crow (Wheeling) |
| Gene Reilly's Best | Quinn, Oster & Lalor, Early Times (Utica, N.Y.) |
| Glen Forest Sour Mash, A. Graf & Co., St. Louis | Ray's Germicide, Cures Many Diseases |
| Golden Heat Rye, H.R. Collins & Co. | Redstone Rye, Clyde Rigman (?), Cincinnati |
| Golden Wedding Rye, 1880, Aberle & Co., St. Paul, Minn. | Schaeffer & Driehorst Rye |
| Humphrey & Martin (Philadelphia) | Straus Bros., Old Crow, Chicago Ill. |
| Imperial Club Pure Rye, Wm. S. Page, NYC | Straus Bros., Monogram Pure Rye, Chicago, Ill |
| John Cristen, Dealer in Old Hermitage | Tileston's Club Sour Mash |
| John Jenkins, from J.A. Nichols, Bristol, Tenn. | W.M. Jacobs, Compliments of |
| John P. Gagen, Lafayette, Indiana, | Welty Old Rye (Waynesboro, Pa.) |
| Old Crow Sour Mash | |
| Keystone Rye, Klein Bros., Cincinnati | |

Information for this article has been gathered from a number of sources on American stoneware and ceramics

Special thanks go to Rob Runge for answering my numerous questions and for sending me excerpts from his own writings on Fulper.
- Jack Sullivan